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Publishers Weekly

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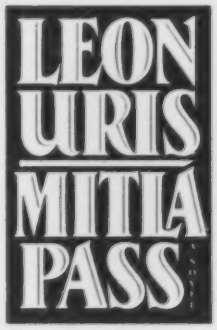

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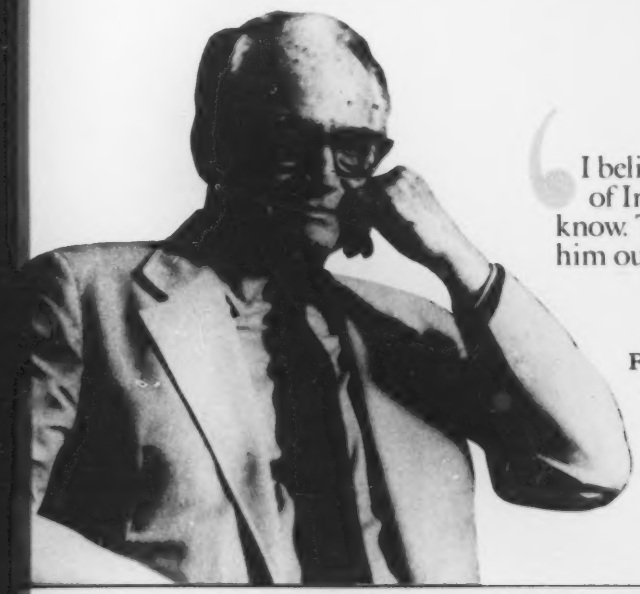

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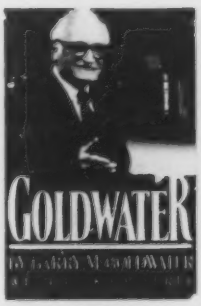

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Who Buys Computer/Reference Books?

BY LEONARD A. WOOD

In a typical week, it seems that nearly everyone has occasion to "look it up"—in a dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, instruction manual or computer book—so it is not surprising that, over the years, books of this type have consistently been the most popular category of nonfiction. In 1987 nearly one in five of all nonfiction book purchases (18%) were described as reference/instruction/computer books, a ratio consistent with that observed in previous years.

Whereas the largest proportion of overall book buyers are women, the reference/instruction/computer book consumers are primarily men (Table 1).

The concentration of 35–49-year-olds is even greater among reference/instruction/computer book buyers than among overall buyers, as is that of the college educated and those with higher incomes.

Reference/instruction/computer books purchased in 1987 were nearly evenly distributed between the hardback (49%) and paperback (51%) formats, in contrast to all book categories purchased last year, where paperbacks clearly dominated hardbacks. Regardless of the format, reference/instruction/computer books tend to be more expensive than average—in 1987, an average of $18.30, 10% more than the overall hardback average of $16.70. There is an even more startling disparity in paperback prices.

Bookstores are the major source of most purchases. However, mail order, either through a book club or some other source, is the purchase point for more than one in five reference books (22%), compared to only one in eight of books overall (13%) (Table 2).

NOTE: Results are based on 10,180 telephone interviews conducted among a nationally representative sample of adults age 18 and older througout 1987.

TABLE 1

CONSUMER PROFILES

	Total Book Buyers	Reference/ Instruction/Computer
	%	%
Sex		
Male	44	53
Female	56	47
Age		
18–24 years	16	10
25–34 years	27	25
35–49 years	31	39
50 and older	25	26
Education		
College	60	72
High school	31	22
Non-high school	8	6
Annual Household Income		
$30,000 or more	46	57
$20,000–$29,999	20	17
$10,000–$19,999	15	12
Under $10,000	6	5
Books Purchased in Past 3 Months		
1–2	16	13
3–4	20	19
5 or more	62	67
Region		
East	26	24
Midwest	24	26
South	26	23
West	24	27

TABLE 2

RETAIL OUTLETS

	Total Books	Reference/ Instruction/Computer
	%	%
Bookstore	55	58
Book club	7	12
Mail order	6	10
Department/Discount	9	5
Supermarket/Grocery	8	3
Drug store	3	2
Newsstand	1	1